

## **Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Avalanche Advisory**

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Good Morning, KD with the Idaho Panhandle avalanche advisory, valid for today, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, March 19<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to Peter Bock of Spokane who sent in observations from a tour last weekend in the Selkirks. We had interesting discussion last night at Schweitzer about in bounds avalanche control with Doug Abromeit, NAC Director, and Bill Williamson, Schweitzer Mountain Operations Manager, and we appreciate their sharing of knowledge. This advisory is sponsored by Idaho Parks and Recreation.

### **WEATHER**

Last Saturday there was an avalanche fatality in the Selkirk Mountains north of Sandpoint in the McCormick Lake Basin on a NE aspect at 6,400 feet. The conditions that we reported last Friday had recently developed from a storm that began in earnest on Thursday and continued with sporadic snowfall until late Saturday. Buried surface hoar was the weak layer on NW through SE aspects above 5,500 feet. The weather since then has not improved the stability of this weak layer significantly but it has localized the problem mainly to NW through E aspects above 5,500 feet. Recall we had some rain at high elevation on Tuesday evening and about 1 inch of snowfall on Wednesday. You'll find a supportive rain and sun crust with light snow on top but use caution when climbing into start zones above 5,500 feet. For today, the NWS is calling for mostly sunny with mountain temperatures in the 30s and calm winds. Clear skies reign into Saturday with mountain temperatures soaring into the 40s and winds picking up from the SW as a warm system rolls in off the Pacific. **The avalanche danger will increase for the outlook period in the afternoon on southerly slopes due to direct radiation and on NW through E slopes if mountain temperatures warm enough to effect subsurface layers. Rain on Sunday will also increase the avalanche danger.**

**Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains are rated as MODERATE on NW - E aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,500 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely. Avalanche conditions will increase to **CONSIDERABLE** on NW- E aspects above 5,500 feet if temperatures warm enough to melt surface layers and **MODERATE** on sun exposed slopes in the late morning and afternoon.

### Snowpack

In the Selkirk Mountains yesterday I found 2 layers of surface hoar on a NE aspect at 6,400 feet. The upper layer is most sensitive reacting with little stress applied and running clean and fast. The slab above it is fairly consolidated and will pull out across a broad width of terrain if triggered. Not much stabilization of this layer since last week on NW-E aspects. I also found the surface hoar on a SE aspect but it was not as well developed and not reacting to shear tests. A decomposing crust a 2 feet deep was rotten and had me concerned for when the pack was heating up and weakening enough to start some slushy slides. You'll find the surface snow pretty tight on all aspects to 5,500 this morning and that will change with more sun.

### Terrain

If you adjust your riding and sliding to spring mode today and this weekend you'll be



right on, BUT don't forget that steep NW-E aspects above 5,500 feet have 2 weak layers of surface hoar. See photo of McCormick avalanche. This is terrain that is still suspect for stability and I would generally not go there, especially during the heat of the day. I noticed that where the pack is shallow I could easily get these layers to fail with a whumph.

Avoid the shallow snow around rock outcrops or where you see a lot of small trees poking out of the snow. Get off steep slopes when the

surface snow is getting slushy. If it rains on Sunday, call it quits.

**Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

### Snowpack

Carole and Dan noticed a small avalanche in a steep and open basin in the Hannacker drainage yesterday. They found 2 layers of surface hoar but found it to be stabilizing and not reacting with clean shears. Structurally, these layers have some potential to be problematic under load so you'll want to determine where they are and how weak they are if you're getting into steep terrain. They did find these layers on all aspects about 2 feet in depth so pay attention to how the sun is affecting the upper pack. Look for avalanche activity to clue you in to potential weak areas. Rain on Sunday will increase the avalanche danger and it sounds like it could rain to the high peaks.

### Terrain

Adjust to spring mode today and this weekend to get off of steep slopes before they get too slushy. There are potential weak layers on multiple aspects. On sheltered high elevation N and E aspects be aware of that surface hoar layer that will be more developed and possibly weaker. Choose your routes to avoid shallow snowpack and convexities, especially around start zones.

Forecasting for the St. Joe region has ended for the 2010 season. Ed is back in timber mode.

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.